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Yoga and sports performance

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Abstract

The most poses are not aerobic in nature; they do in fact send oxygen to the cells in the body by way of conscious deep breathing and sustained stretching and contraction of different muscle groups. Whatever sport you choose to practice, yoga can enhance and complement your ability. Most sports build muscular strength and stamina, often in specific areas of the body. Yoga can benefit professional sports persons, it is necessary to explore what is required to play a sport and play it well. It is well acknowledged that to play any sport, whether it be tennis, volleyball, surfing, swimming or running, we must develop the basic skills and continually train the body so that we can apply the skill in a refined and polished way. This of course requires considerable time, energy and commitment to practice the skill at hand. Having a body that is flexible, strong and controlled is also another important consideration, if one is not able to move the body with the grace, velocity and speed required, then performance will be lackluster. So, we can say that yoga is very beneficial to everyone especially for sportsmen.

Keywords: Yoga, sports, performance etc

Introduction

Yoga as a technique to help people achieve spiritual enlightenment. Based on the idea that the mind and body are one, students believe that Yoga improves health by improving how you see the world, which calms the spirit and decreases stress. Today, people practice Yoga to improve their physical, mental and/or spiritual wellbeing. There are many disciplines of yoga that emphasize different aspects of the mind, body and spirit. However, in the West, mainstream Yoga focuses largely on the physical practice, primarily Hatha Yoga. Hatha is a widespread style that incorporates a series of poses (called Asana) that emphasize stretching, breathing (called Pranayama), relaxation and meditation techniques to help build strength, increase flexibility and balance, and improve coordination. Yoga has a lot of definitions floating around in today's world; however, if we go back to the roots of the word, we find that the term 'Yoga' has its origins in Sanskrit. It means to unite – Yoga helps the body to unite with the other vital metaphysical aspects of the mind and spirit. It is also often defined as a lifestyle which aims to have a healthy mind within a healthy body. Most simply defined, yoga is a set of poses or 'asanas', coupled with breathing techniques, which help impart strength and flexibility to the body while helping to balance the mind and its' thinking. Unlike other physical forms of exercises, like the aerobics, by practicing yoga, one can not only achieve physical health, but also mental and spiritual wellbeing.

There is a great need of yoga and yogic practices to be taught and also to practice yoga, to overcome physical, mental and physiological problems. My paper largely deals with the mental aspects, as it is the current need. I urge upon the August body to see that yoga to be made simple rather than complex through research for the following reasons Development of science and technology in the recent years has made man's life fast, busy and full of tensions. The pressure on the muscles has been largely taken away by the machines, but the pressure on the nerves has greatly increased. This has resulted in what are called stress disorders or the psychosomatic disorders. Our mind and body is capable of bearing the load of tension to a certain limit. If tension continues beyond that limit, then the balance of the psycho-physiological processes is disturbed, and that results into various symptoms of maladjustment the mind expresses the tension in the form of impulses that flow from the brain to various muscles of the body. If these muscles continue to make an impact on the glands and organs, this will give rise to the malfunctioning of the organ or glands concerned.

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Unless and until the mind be relieved of the tension prevailing in it, the disorder of the organs concerned can't be rectified.

The most important benefit of yoga is physical and mental therapy. The aging process; which is largely an artificial condition, caused mainly by auto-intoxication or self-poisoning, can be slowed down by practicing yoga. Regular practice of asanas, pranayama and meditation can help such diverse ailments such as diabetes, the aim of yoga is to promote overall well being of the body. And though, it is found beneficial for a variety of conditions, it is not considered a therapy for specific illness. Unlike other forms of exercises, yoga has a more holistic approach to teach the people the right way to lead their lives disease free and stress free. In today's world, all of us suffer from stress and a perpetual anxiety to perform well, leading to a plethora of diseases that we expose ourselves to. Yoga aims to calm and compose our minds and help us focus clearly on what really matters – good health and the happiness that accompanies it. The practice of yoga was first developed in India and has evolved over thousands of years.

Benefits of yoga on Sports Performance

Mental health

Let us first begin with the benefits of Yoga on mental health. After all, good mental health is of paramount importance for being healthy physically as well. As advised above, breathing technique forms an integral part of Yoga. Do I hear you asking 'how?' It really is very basic – by breathing deep and right, something that you would be doing when you practice Yoga, you are inhaling more oxygen and allowing the cells of your body to have access to that oxygen for a longer period of time.

A common practice in yoga is to breathe only from one nostril at a time, while holding the other one closed with the tip of your finger. Medical research has shown that this boosts increased activity of the opposite side of the brain, leading to better cognitive performance and tasks associated with the other side of the brain. Regular yoga practice helps children with attention deficit disorder and people suffering from anxiety, depression and mood swings. It also helps keep the mind calm and reduce stress and thereby increase the general wellbeing of the person.

Strength

Ever wondered, why so many of us, after a hard day's work, come and plonk ourselves, on our home sofas, with very little energy to even fetch a glass of water for ourselves. This is caused by lack of inner strength. Certain asanas of the yoga help generate inner strength. Inner strength is essential in doing day to day activities and in preventing you from injuries. This is especially useful, as we grow old and need more energy and strength to do the same activity.

Flexibility

The popular notion that you need to be flexible in order to do yoga is incorrect; it is really the other way round – you should do yoga so that you can be more flexible. If you have a flexible body, you find it easy to do tasks. A lot of poses in Yoga concentrate on stretching and improving your flexibility.

With yoga, not only the muscles of the body, but also the softer tissues of your body are worked out, resulting in less buildup of the lactic acid, which is responsible for stiffness in various parts of the body. Yoga increases a range of motions of the less used inner muscles and helps in lubrication of

joints. The result is a more flexible body, able to perform tasks easily.

Cardiovascular

Yoga has a lot of positive effects on the cardiovascular system of our body. A healthy cardiovascular system is responsible for preventing heart attacks, strokes and hypertension. Heart disease is a problem which has roots in an improper lifestyle, faulty diet and negative thinking. Our thoughts, emotions and feelings affect our body and negative emotions/thoughts send a series of complex and unhealthy chemical processes throughout the body, giving alarms that something is amiss. Yoga tends to control these by bringing in fresh life-giving oxygen. The antioxidant properties of Yoga help in preventing the negative emotions and promote a general wellbeing in the body.

Joint pain and arthritis

The general tendency of people suffering from joint pain, inflammation and stiffness is to avoid exercise. Yoga helps prevent advancement of this malady by toning the muscles and loosening the joints. When a person suffering from joint pain practices yoga, the gentle stretching and strengthening movements of the various Yogic poses, improves the blood flow to the muscles and tissues supporting the joints, thereby making it more comfortable to move.

Respiratory problems

Practice of certain asanas of Yoga has helped check chronic cases of Asthma and other respiratory problems. When the nasal passages get inflamed, they start producing mucous in excess making it difficult to breathe and often have common symptoms like coughing, wheezing etc. Respiratory problems could also be caused by multiple factors like allergy, exercise, weather change etc. By practicing yoga, the lungs capacities increase and so does stamina and stress on air passages is reduced.

Back pain

Yoga has helped innumerable cases of back ache. Back ache is caused due to stress and tension in the muscles supporting the spinal cord. Back ache may be caused due to improper postures mild injuries, which have been left untreated etc. Yoga has seemed to help cases of back pain by enhancing flexibility and strengthening the muscle groups supporting the spine, helping the body to maintain an upright posture. It eases the back pain by increase in blood circulation and getting healing nutrients to the injured muscles. Apart from healing injured muscles, it also prevents further injuries by strengthening the muscles.

Memory improvement

Yoga helps in retaining information better and for a longer period of time due to its focus on concentration and meditation. By breathing right, concentrating and meditating, more blood flows to the brain, making it supple and ready to accept more information and reproduce that information when required.

Obesity

Obesity is when a person weighs more than his normal/stipulated weight. This may be caused due to faulty eating habits; stress related eating, imbalances in the digestive and endocrine system or even something as basic as less physical exercise. Yoga helps obesity by inhaling more oxygen, which

helps in breaking down fat cells and increasing your metabolism. Also, it helps remove sluggishness from the digestive and endocrine systems. What are the benefits of yoga?

- Balance mind and body
- Improve body strength and stamina
- Increase total flexibility
- Increase awareness of tension in the body
- Assist relaxation through use of breath static stretching
- Improve general, mental, physical and spiritual health
- Aids in rehabilitation and healing/preventing injuries systems, making them work better.

Asthma Studies conducted at yoga institutions in India have reported impressive success in improving asthma. It has also been proved that asthma attacks can usually be prevented by yoga methods without resorting to drugs.

Respiration Problems Patients who practice yoga have a better chance of gaining the ability to control their breathing problems. With the help of yogic breathing exercises, it is possible to control an attack of severe shortness of breath without having to seek medical help. Various studies have confirmed the beneficial effects of yoga for patients with respiratory problems.

High Blood Pressure the relaxation and exercise components of yoga have a major role to play in the treatment and prevention of high blood pressure (hypertension). A combination of biofeedback and yogic breathing and relaxation techniques has been found to lower blood pressure and reduce the need for high blood pressure medication in people suffering from it.

Pain Management Yoga is believed to reduce pain by helping the brain's pain center regulate the gate controlling mechanism located in the spinal cord and the secretion of natural painkillers in the body. Breathing exercises used in yoga can also reduce pain. Because muscles tend to relax when you exhale, lengthening the time of exhalation can help produce relaxation and reduce tension. Awareness of breathing helps to achieve calmer, slower respiration and aid in relaxation and pain management.

Effects of yoga on different factors

Physical effects

- Increase suppleness through stretching muscles
- Improves joint mobility by lengthening ligaments to their healthy limits
- Reduces risk of injury and assists with injury rehabilitation
- Effective as a form of soft tissue and collagen fibre rehabilitation
- Helps to bring the body back into alignment and improves posture
- Increases stride length
- Enhances co-ordination and agility
- Contributes to improved cardiovascular fitness and stamina
- Teaches athletes how the body performs and functions as a synergistic unit
- Lowers resting heart rate and increases VO₂ max

Psychological effects

- Relieves performance anxiety and stress, and frees athletes from mental distractions
- Improves focus
- Develops determination and self-discipline

- Teaches athletes to challenge themselves and go outside of their comfort zone
- Reduces stress and provides a method of relaxation
- Breath work provides athlete with techniques they can use whilst competing to control arousal levels
- Helps athletes to achieve flow and get in 'the zone'
- Teaches athletes how to use imagery and relaxation
- Helps athletes to understand the importance of relaxing, resting, and recovering

Team effects

- Improves team cohesion
- Increases team motivation
- Provides an opportunity for team unity outside the demands of intense training
- Increases trust
- Improves player-player support

Conclusion

Overall, the studies comparing the effects of yoga and exercise seem to indicate that, in both healthy and diseased populations, yoga may be as effective or better than exercise at improving a variety of health-related outcome measures including HRV, to improve subjective measures of fatigue pain, and sleep in healthy and ill populations. However, future clinical trials are needed to further examine the distinctions between exercise and yoga, particularly how the two modalities may differ. In their effects on sports performance, researcher find out that yoga in sports as important as other think it helps us in different ways and different levels in a sports men life.

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